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***CapTel
Disconnect***

Produced by the CapTel Workers Union

Who We Are

We are every color, every size, every age, every gender. We are overworked and under paid, overlooked and under pressure. We are disrespected. And yet, we are the backbone of CapTel, and we deserve to be heard.

5-Point Platform

1 A Living Wage

This means a minimum of \$15/hr for CAs. CapTel Inc currently makes \$1.82/minute of captioned calls. CAs make \$0.18/minute for captioning. That is less than 10% of the capital we create for this company coming back to us. We demand that our wages be immediately increased to at least \$15/hr. This would increase our income to \$0.25/min.

2 Ninety Percent Adherence

We demand that CapTel reduce our monthly adherence compliance threshold from 95% to 90%. From needing to use the bathroom frequently to having to step out due to triggering call content, there are many reasons for reducing the adherence limit. We believe that 90% per day is a fair ask that will minimize the harm of the times when CapTel requires that we be out of adherence while doing our jobs, and give us a little extra time to care for our physical and mental health.

Put simply, the problem is not where the money is going, but that the company calls Keller a “political activist” to avoid using the word “socialist” and then profits off of her memory.

The only thing keeping CapTel from donating their own profits is greed. CapTel claims in the CapTel Connect, the publication that this zine satirizes, that these “charity” drives promote morale among its workers.

We submit that better healthcare and better wages would do more to boost “morale” than \$1 donuts ever could.

“The true task,” said Helen Keller, “is to unite and organize all workers on an economic basis, and it is the workers themselves who must secure freedom for themselves, who must grow strong.”

The CapTel Workers Union is an IWW union and we fully support Keller’s statement concerning our parent union: “That is why I became an IWW... Because I discovered that the true idea of the IWW is not only to better conditions, for all people, but to get them at once.”

The CapTel Workers Union wishes to honor the memory of Helen Keller and the good work that the Helen Keller Foundation does by continuing her struggle for workers’ rights and not by exploiting her name for profit and a PR stunt.

It's ironic that the whole world knows the story of how Keller learned to talk, but so few of us have heard what she had to say

Unionizing: The Legacy of Helen Keller

We are all familiar with the Helen Keller of the *Miracle Worker*, the young girl who learns how to communicate with others through the help of her tutor, Anne Sullivan. Far less known is the adult Helen Keller, member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who spent time in jail after standing up for workers' rights.

Her life's work has been all but forgotten, sanitized from the history books in favor of heartwarming stories about a child overcoming adversity because of a tenacious tutor. It's ironic that the whole world knows the story of how Keller learned to talk, but so few of us have heard what she had to say.

It is doubly ironic, and even tragic, that CapTel exploits her memory for free publicity and profit. Not only does CapTel pay Captioning Assistants a tiny fraction of what they make off of our labor, they then have the gall to donate the proceeds from sales of donuts, Fritos, or even books and movies that *we ourselves* donated to the Helen Keller Foundation, a charitable contribution that gives the company tax breaks.

Not only is CapTel making a profit, but they're selling it under the guise of "charity" and "boosting employee morale."

CapTel makes millions every single year and the money its employees give for these charity drives is a pittance compared to their profits. They could easily donate this amount of money directly to the Helen Keller Foundation from their own coffers.

Indeed, they should be providing this money themselves, as the Helen Keller Foundation does some amazing work helping people with disabilities.

3 *Better Equipment and Maintenance*

CapTel needs an immediate equipment makeover. Old and failing CRT monitors give workers headaches, many of our keyboards have important keys missing, most of our chairs are broken in some way, and breakdowns in the kitchen or at the water fountains go unattended. We demand updates to our monitors and desks. We also ask that CapTel hire additional maintenance personnel to insure that the equipment we already have is well cared for and swiftly repaired.

4 *Transportation Compensation*

CAs need to be reimbursed for transportation expenses. Since the Milwaukee location doesn't have a designated parking lot, CAs are expected to pay for parking. In addition, the rising cost of public transportation takes a significant bite out of our paychecks. We want at least \$10 a week to subsidize our transportation costs. Until CapTel provides free parking and waivers for buses, they should be at least partially responsible for our travel expenses.

5 *Union Liasons*

We demand that CapTel recognize the voice of CAs on an institutional level. To do this we ask that CapTel accept the appointment of at least one person compensated by the union with direct access to admin meetings and information as well as the ability to serve as a mediator between workers and HR/admin. Workers deserve to have more concrete information about how the company is run and deserve the chance to voice concerns or make suggestions.

But CapTel Is Okay! Why Do We Need A Union?

When talking with fellow workers about unionism, one hears numerous objections. These range from a belief that CapTel is a temporary situation for them to cynicism and apathy. There are answers to all of these objections, and our literature has covered them well.

Left out, however, is the person who thinks CapTel is basically alright. The person who feels that the rules are more or less reasonable, that upper admin does a fair job, and that CapTel offers a decent situation with decent working conditions. If you're that person, keep reading – this is for you.

Guess what? I agree with you. There are times when situations don't seem to have been resolved perfectly or when administrators made a mistake, but overall, many of the people in charge at CapTel seem to act with an eye towards everyone's best interests.

They often respect the diversity of opinion and background in the CA population, and tend to push towards a genuinely flexible and tolerant workplace. There are decent people at all levels of the company, and this is often reflected in CapTel's practices.

Given that, why a union? If management is basically honorable and trustworthy, what is there to gain from adversarial relations? Why support any of the posturing and rhetoric that comes with organizing? Why take the time, trouble, and potential risk of rocking the boat when there's really no need?

B I N G O

Jamaican accent	"Read the phone, mom!"	Hold music with lyrics	Busy signal	"Happy birthday!"
Scam call	Jehovah's Witnesses	Southern accent	Talking about the weather	Sports discussion
Family drama	"I love you!"	★	F-bomb	Right-wing politics
Shopping over the phone	CapTel customer service	Political conference call	Foreign language call	"Kids these days"
Banking call	Mahjong or bridge	Pharmacy call	Phone sex	Doctor's office



Start by looking at the 5-point platform of the CapTel Worker's Union. Sure, more pay is never a bad thing, but there are four other points in the platform, too.

Let's go straight to the end, point 5. It's last not because it's least important, but because it's the entire point. It's what we are building towards: a voice for CAs.

What does that really mean? It means genuine transparency at CapTel.

It means a workplace where no one is terminated without a genuine chance to have their voice heard and their circumstances considered.

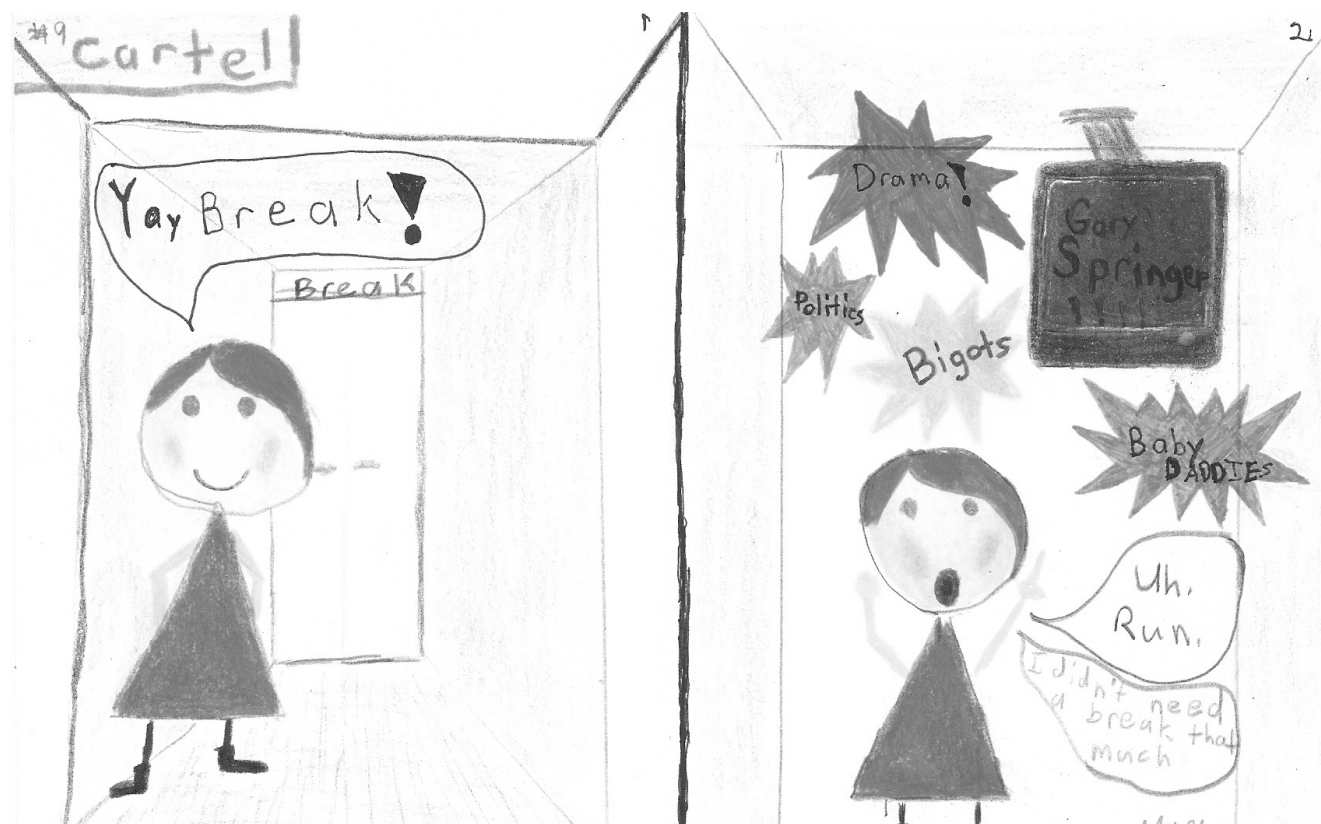
It means a chance to address any situation that comes up for any worker with care and compassion.

It means a voice in making policy, a chance to try to create new solutions for the negative sides of this work.

It means a workplace that is built on a democratic partnership and a sense of shared endeavor.

You may say that "mediation with HR" means that the lazy or unwilling merely get a chance to manipulate their way into being an ongoing drag on their peers, but democratic standards and participation don't necessarily have that result.

A better, fairer, stronger CapTel will still not be a place for everybody, and it will still require that all of us put in our daily work.



What mediation does mean, though, is that company policy cannot be a black box-the rules will stay clear to all, and changes can be thought through and promoted at every level of the company, including the CA level. It's also worth pointing out that no unionized workplace has a policy that no one can be fired, nor is that what we're trying to achieve.

This voice has to participate in the truly difficult decisions to matter, and management has to have real reasons to listen

The fight is not for eternal job security, but for due process and clear procedures.

Even if you believe that the people at the top are largely decent people striving to do right by their employees, this makes sense. Everyone makes mistakes, everyone has off days, and every story has another side.

There is no reason that representation for the rank and file at CapTel means that employment decisions will be constantly overturned, or every tiny detail second guessed. All it means is that transparency is built in to the system.

Right now, CapTel builds every bit of its system on fairly rigid rules and progressive discipline, which means adding in transparency wouldn't even be difficult to do. It centralizes all important decision making in one location, and sets policy on a one-size-fits-all basis across all locations.

Instead of this job being about providing a quality service, it has become a sheer numbers game - and CapTel doesn't seem to care.

"Do I need to cancel the doctor's appointment I've been waiting six months for because I might be late for work if I go?"
"Should I drive aggressively so I can avoid being two minutes late for work?"

These are not questions we should have to ask ourselves and CapTel needs to change this system.

There are so many ways CapTel could implement bonuses that incentivize providing quality captions rather than merely showing up to work and it doesn't make sense that this ridiculous, tiered bonus that pays out a half of its value in the last month is the system they went with.

A system where the bonus is the same each month removes the ridiculous requirement of achieving perfection for two full seasons, and a system where the bonus is reliant upon work performance rewards good CAs, reduces CapTel's turnover rate, and increases the incentive for mediocre CAs to step it up.

This is why a voice for CAs is so important - without that voice, nonsensical systems like this one are put in place and we have no say in the matter.

This doesn't improve the "client experience" admin is constantly harping on us about

The Attendance Bonus is Shit

The full six month attendance bonus works out to \$0.73 an hour for someone working 40 hours a week and \$1.94 an hour for someone working 15 hours a week.

A full-time CA who has a medical condition that requires missing work once every couple months has an effective pay rate lower than that of a part-time employee who lives down the block and never misses work.

The first CA can have near-perfect reviews, excellent monitor scores, and great work performance in general, while the second CA can have numerous PVs in all categories and provide terrible captions to our clients. Despite this, because our bonuses are purely based on attendance, the worse employee is paid more.

This doesn't improve the "client experience" admin is constantly harping on us about. In most cases, it also doesn't provide incentives for good employees to continue being good - or even to continue working here.

Instead, it creates an all-or-nothing system that brutally punishes regular life circumstances while rewarding utter mediocrity. It's the workplace equivalent of a participation trophy that completely disregards our actual quality of work.

Further compounding this problem is that the attendance system is also a primary determinant of our raises every review period, with only a small part of our raises actually being determined by job performance.

This attempt at making rules objective and unambiguous means that the specific character and demands of each location are often forgotten, and also means that the ability to consider individual circumstances is frequently lost, or at least secondary to the overall goal of ensuring that all the i's are dotted and t's are crossed.

Examples of this abound, from scheduling policies that don't mesh well with Milwaukee's public transportation system to the attendance systems that don't account for the unique demands of each location's commute and weather events.

CA participation in decision making can allow each location to take account of its specific circumstances and the population from which CAs are drawn to make the best decisions possible for the people doing the most important jobs at CapTel.

A workplace where the voice of the workers is respected and valued is critical. This is not something that can be given as a favor by management because special treatment can just be withdrawn at any time. It has to be deep in the structure of the organization itself to be truly meaningful. This voice has to participate in the truly difficult decisions to matter, and management has to have real reasons to listen.

So dismiss the 5-point platform as pipe dreams if you like. Feel free to say that 90% adherence is unnecessary, or that the chairs are fine. But know that it's only with a union, and its ability to insist that management take us seriously, that any of your opinions on your work can ever matter.

Vicarious Living

I've heard there is life

After CapTel

Where the daisies push you up

Instead of the other way around

A welcome mat

A home sweet home

But not for me

The cord of my headset

Strangles

Comingled voices jangle my nerves

What are you having for dinner

Existential angst, I reckon

After describing the plates of

America the Complacent

Hasten to save me

Oh, CTO

Or throw me off the balcony

So tired all the time

Incapable of holding down a relationship

Or meeting up with friends

Because I spend all my energy

In the middle

With no way out

Day after miserable day

Repeating the repugnant

Shit I never would say

Alone in a cube

Breathing false prophecy

Lonely and bitter

Trading my humanity

Becoming a machine

MOODS OF A CA

